



National Evaluation of Weed & Seed

Case Study



Manatee and Sarasota Counties, Florida Research Report



Executive Office for Weed & Seed

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RESEARCH REPORT

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1.0 Introduction

Unveiled in 1991, Operation Weed and Seed represents an ambitious attempt to improve the quality of life in America's cities. The ultimate goals of Weed and Seed are to control violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime in targeted high-crime neighborhoods and to provide a safe environment, free of crime and drug use, in which law-abiding citizens can live, work, and raise their families. Weed and Seed, administered by the Executive Office for Weed and Seed (EOWS), is grounded in the philosophy that targeted areas can best be improved by a two-pronged strategy of "weeding" out violent offenders, drug traffickers, and other criminals by removing them from the targeted area and "seeding" the area with human services and neighborhood revitalization efforts. Community policing is intended to serve as the "bridge" between weeding and seeding.

Three key objectives emphasize the government-community partnership at the heart of Weed and Seed:

1. To **develop a comprehensive, multiagency strategy** to control and prevent violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime in targeted high-crime neighborhoods.
2. To **coordinate and integrate both new and existing Federal, State, local, and private sector initiatives, criminal justice efforts, and human services**, concentrating these resources in the project sites to maximize their impact to reduce and prevent violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime.
3. To **mobilize community residents** in the targeted sites to assist law enforcement to identify and remove violent offenders and drug traffickers from their neighborhoods and to help other human services agencies identify and respond to service needs.

Weed and Seed sites thus draw on the resources of a variety of agencies at all levels of government, private and other public organizations, and individual community residents.

Specific strategies and program components designed to achieve these three objectives fall into one of four Weed and Seed program elements:

1. **Law enforcement.** Weed and Seed's law enforcement goals are the identification, arrest, prosecution, conviction, and incarceration of narcotics traffickers and violent criminals operating in the target area.
2. **Community policing.** An objective of community policing is to establish mutual trust between law enforcement and the public. This is the bridge between weeding and seeding: law enforcement officials enlist the community's help to identify patterns of criminal activity and locate perpetrators; simultaneously, police help the community solve problems.

3. **Prevention, intervention, and treatment.** This element of the program is intended to reduce risk factors and to enhance protective factors that are associated with drug abuse, violence, and crime in the target area. Safe havens in the target areas typically coordinate the prevention, intervention, and treatment activities.
4. **Neighborhood restoration.** The goal of this element is to enable residents in the target area to improve their community morale, their neighborhood's physical appearance (buildings, parks, streets, lighting, and so forth), and local economic and business conditions.

An important structural feature of Weed and Seed is the local steering committee. EOWS requires each site to have a steering committee, formally chaired by the U.S. Attorney for the district in which the site is located, that is responsible for “establishing Weed and Seed’s goals and objectives, designing and developing programs, providing guidance on implementation, and assessing program achievement.”¹

Steering committee members include representatives from key local, State, and Federal agencies, as well as other stakeholders in the Weed and Seed target area, such as business leaders, tenant association leaders, and community activists. The requirement to convene a steering committee reflects EOWS’s belief that, for neighborhood revitalization to work, all key stakeholders must participate in decisions that affect the target area.

Funded sites were divided into officially recognized sites and demonstration sites. Officially recognized sites had implemented Weed and Seed strategies in their jurisdictions, had submitted documentation summarizing their strategy to EOWS, but had not yet received full funding from EOWS. After EOWS officially recognized a site, it was eligible for demonstration status and full Weed and Seed funding.

2.0 Case Study Objective and Methodology

This case study is one of eight completed for the National Evaluation of Weed and Seed, under the direction of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). In 1994, NIJ selected the following eight sites for the national evaluation:

- Hartford, Connecticut; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Sarasota and Manatee Counties, Florida; and Shreveport, Louisiana; were demonstration sites that first received funding in FY 1994.²

1 Executive Office for Weed and Seed, “Operation Weed and Seed Implementation Manual,” p. 2–1.

2 Because the Sarasota and Manatee Counties site consisted of six distinct target areas, the actual funding per target area was more comparable to the funding level for an officially recognized Weed and Seed site.

- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Seattle, Washington, were demonstration sites awarded continuation funding in FY 1994.
- Akron, Ohio, and Salt Lake City, Utah, were officially recognized sites.

Pittsburgh, Salt Lake City, and Manatee/Sarasota also received funds from the National Performance Review Laboratory (NPRL).³

This case study documents the activities implemented under the Weed and Seed program in Manatee/Sarasota Counties in Florida and assesses the program's impact at this site. The final evaluation report compares the eight sites and presents overall conclusions on the Weed and Seed program.

The evaluation activities undertaken for this case study include: (1) onsite observation of program activities; (2) inperson interviews with program staff, key law enforcement personnel, community leaders, service providers, and participants; (3) review of program documents; (4) a survey of target area residents; and (5) analysis of computerized crime and arrest records provided by the local police department.

3.0 Site History and Description

3.1 County Characteristics

The Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed project was unusual in its breadth, involving two counties, four local law enforcement agencies, and six different target areas. The national evaluation focused on two of the target areas in Manatee County—North Manatee and South Manatee—although some process and contextual information was provided about the other four sites and the project in its entirety.⁴

Manatee and Sarasota Counties are located along Florida's west coast, south of Tampa and St. Petersburg, and have a population of almost 500,000 persons in 1,314 square miles.⁵ Most of the residents live along the nearly 300 miles of coastline, while the eastern sections of the counties are devoted primarily to agriculture. In Manatee and Sarasota Counties, the population is 91 percent

3 The National Performance Review Task Force (now renamed the National Partnership for Reinventing Government) designated a number of governmental organizations or activities as National Performance Review Laboratories (now Reinvention Laboratories) to test "reinventing government" initiatives. These labs developed more efficient ways to deliver government services by creating new partnerships between entities, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and empowering organizations to make substantial changes. The mission of the Weed and Seed Reinvention Laboratory is to develop more effective mechanisms that combine and deliver Federal, State, and local resources in Weed and Seed sites.

4 Originally the National Evaluation undertaken by ISA only focused on North Manatee; South Manatee was also included to add some breadth because North Manatee is a small target area.

5 1990 U.S. census.

white, 6 percent black, and 3 percent Hispanic.⁶ One-third of the population consists of senior residents, and approximately 60,000 additional senior citizens come to the area between October and April.⁷ In addition, an average of 1.5 million tourists visit the Manatee/Sarasota area each year due to its location and the warm climate. Approximately 16,000 migrant farm workers also reside in the Manatee/Sarasota area during certain seasons. Thus, the number of persons in Manatee and Sarasota Counties is ever-shifting, and the general population is expected to increase rapidly in the upcoming years. The counties' revenues are inadequate to finance or provide the additional services needed for such influxes. Many of the employment opportunities that new residents find are low-paying or seasonal. According to the 1990 census, average per capita income is \$14,444 in Manatee County and \$28,761 in Sarasota County. In Manatee County—with a population of 211,707—1 of 4 residents more than 25 years old does not have a high school diploma, and 10 percent of the total population lives below the poverty level.⁸

In spite of the area's reputation as a vacation destination, Manatee County has experienced major drug trafficking and gang activities in the past decade. Crack cocaine hit the area hard around 1985, and crime skyrocketed; in 1985, robberies doubled. Law enforcement efforts decreased crime in 1987 but, by the late 1980s, crime was increasing again in the county. In the late 1980s, Manatee County's youth gang activities, primarily robbery and auto theft, also increased. Targeted enforcement efforts decreased the volume of these activities, but remaining activities have become more organized in the 1990s, with gang members often acting as the street operators for organized crime.⁹

In recent years—1993 through 1996—Part 1 crime rates are still higher in Manatee County than the U.S. average, as illustrated in exhibit 3.1.¹⁰

3.2 Target Area Characteristics and Nature of Problems

The six target areas were chosen because of their high levels of economic hardship and criminal activity, the desire and willingness of target area residents to work together toward a common solution, and the aim of the steering committee to increase program effectiveness through a coordinated regional effort. Three of the target areas—North Manatee, Bradenton, and South Manatee—are located in Manatee County, while the other three target areas—Newtown, Gillespie Park, and Laurel/Nokomis—are in Sarasota County. Together, the target areas include a population of 36,471 in 6 noncontiguous target areas distributed over a 40-square-mile area along Florida's west coast. Exhibit 3.2 shows the location of the 6 target areas in Manatee and Sarasota Counties.

6 Manatee/Sarasota 1997 Weed and Seed application.

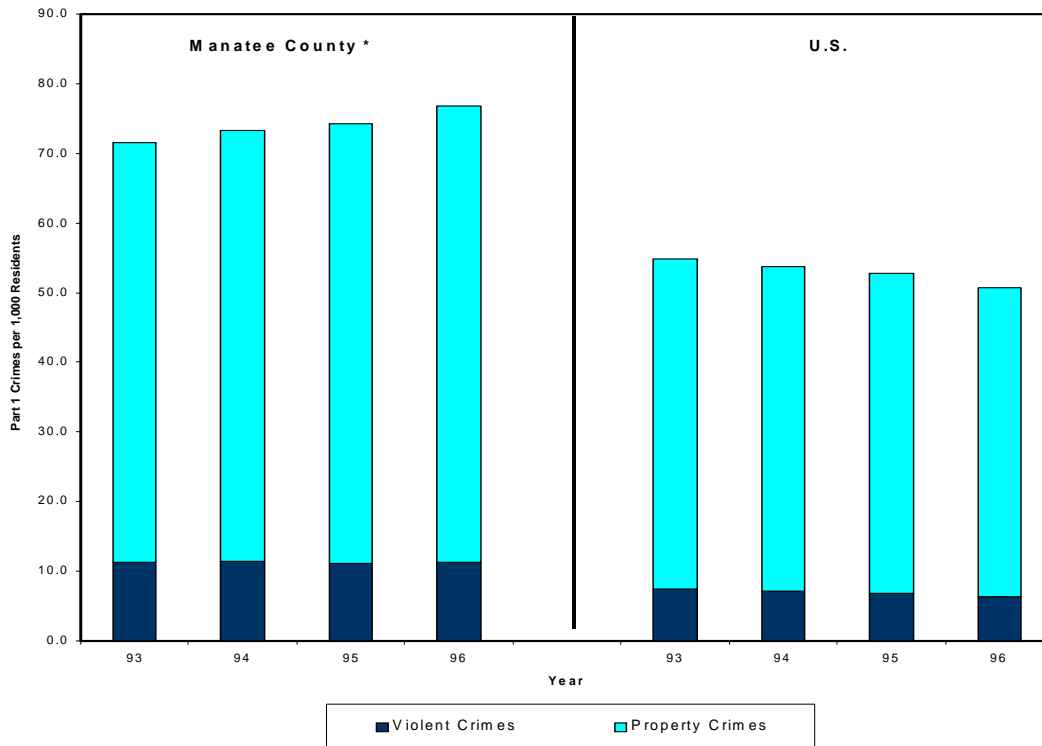
7 According to the 1990 census, 28 percent of Manatee County's population was age 65 and older.

8 1990 census and Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed applications.

9 Officials from Manatee County Sheriff's Office and Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed applications.

10 Part 1 crimes include violent crimes (homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) and property crimes (burglary, larceny, and auto theft).

Exhibit 3.1
Part 1 Crimes per 1,000 Residents



Source: Incident-level data supplied by Manatee County Sheriff's Office. Weed and Seed activities started October 1994.

* Portion of Manatee County under jurisdiction of Manatee County Sheriff's Office, which includes an area with an estimated population of 154,000.

North Manatee has the smallest population of the six target areas, with 3,327 residents inhabiting an area of less than 2 square miles. It has the highest proportion of blacks (76 percent) among the sites and the highest overall proportion of minority residents (91 percent). This target area also has the highest proportion of residents on public assistance (25 percent), which is 5 times higher than the rate for all of Manatee County. It has the second highest proportion of elderly residents (37 percent) and the lowest proportion of children (24 percent). Nearly half of the adult residents of North Manatee did not graduate from high school, and 22 percent of the 16- to 19-year-olds in the neighborhood are not in school.¹¹

The Manatee County target areas were the center of most of the county's crime; according to the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, approximately 90 percent of drug trafficking in the county took place in the North and South Manatee target areas. As of 1992, North Manatee was home to several open-air drug markets and was regarded by police as the worst area in the two counties. It often required four to five patrol units to handle routine calls, and bar crowds filled streets and intersections, impeding traffic. The North Manatee target area is a less transient neighborhood than

¹¹ Manatee/Sarasota 1994 Weed and Seed application.

**EXHIBIT 3.2, "SARASOTA AND
MANATEE COUNTY WEED AND
SEED AREAS," IS NOT AVAILABLE
IN THIS FORMAT.**

South Manatee. Much of the housing stock in the area is owner occupied. At the time Weed and Seed was initiated, a significant number of the homes were in various stages of disrepair.

The South Manatee target area has a population of 8,620 persons in 1.25 square miles. The neighborhood consists primarily of low-income duplex rental units. As compared with North Manatee, South Manatee has a younger and more transient population, with a smaller percentage of minority and elderly residents. South Manatee has the highest proportion of single mothers of any of the target areas and a high proportion of households with children (44 percent). More than one-third of adults in the South Manatee target area did not graduate from high school, and 20 percent of residents live below the poverty level, according to the 1990 census.

South Manatee has been the principal location for most of the street-level and mid-level narcotics dealing in Manatee County. After North Manatee, South Manatee has the worst crime problems, exacerbated by displacement of drug and other criminal activities from North Manatee.

In anticipation of Weed and Seed, targeted enforcement began in the North and South Manatee target areas in late 1992, 2 years prior to actual Weed and Seed funding; most of this activity was concentrated in North Manatee. Despite significant reductions in crime with this preprogram effort, both neighborhoods at the start of Weed and Seed were still regarded as having serious crime problems.

Exhibit 3.3 compares the rates of Part 1 crimes for the North and South Manatee target areas with all of Manatee County and of the United States for 1993–96.¹² Most significantly, in the target areas, the rates of violent crimes were more than double the rates in the county.

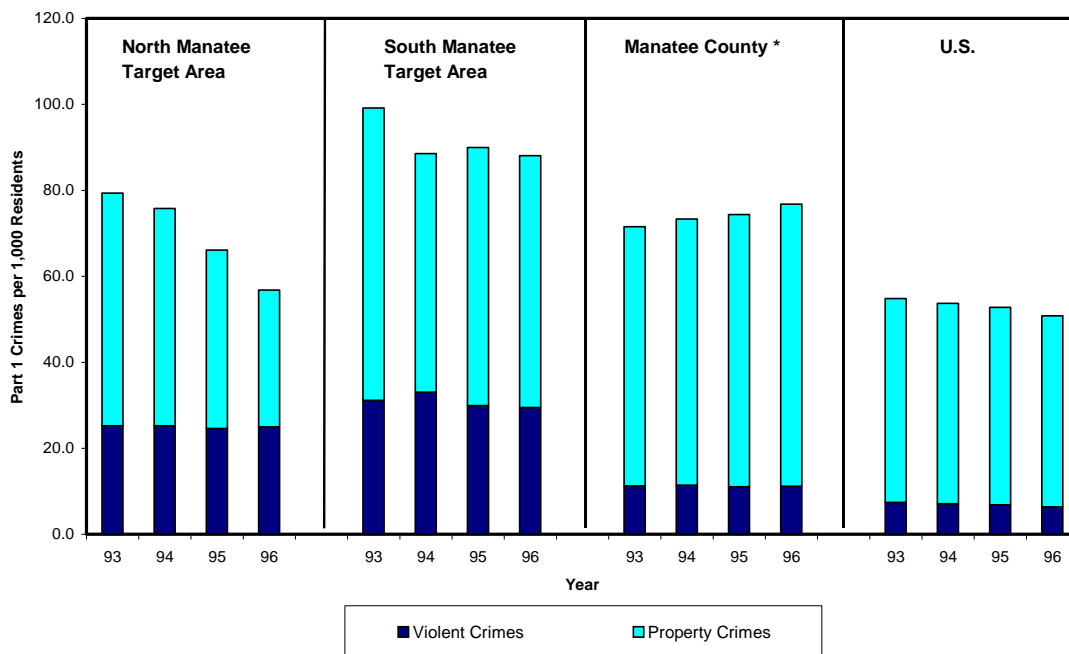
According to nonrandom community surveys conducted by the grantee, Drug Free Communities, in early 1995 (with 1,785 total respondents), an average of 27 percent of residents in the Manatee County target areas were victims of crime in the previous year, and nearly a third felt unsafe alone during the day in their neighborhoods. Residents of the Manatee County target areas experienced more crime, more concern about crime, and more fear of crime than did residents of the three Sarasota County target areas, according to the survey.

3.3 Other Funding Sources

The Weed and Seed program in Manatee/Sarasota Counties was built on the foundation established through funding support from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). CSAP, as part of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has been the Nation's lead agency on substance abuse prevention services. The CSAP partnership and coalition program focus was to establish local grassroots partnerships to address substance abuse prevention. The Weed and Seed effort benefited significantly from this

12 Manatee County crime data includes those areas under the jurisdiction of the Manatee County Sheriff's Office. Statistics based on incident-level crime data provided by the Manatee County Sheriff's Office.

Exhibit 3.3
Part 1 Crimes per 1,000 Residents



Source: Incident-level data supplied by Manatee County Sheriff's Office. Weed and Seed activities started October 1994.

* Portion of Manatee County under jurisdiction of Manatee County Sheriff's Office, which includes an area with an estimated population of 154,000.

previous partnership. Also, as a result of the CSAP partnership, Drug Free Communities identified local, State, and Federal resources to enhance the Weed and Seed effort. CSAP funding, a significant portion of Drug Free Communities' budget, continued until October 1998.

The four local law enforcement agencies involved with Weed and Seed all received Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funding. The Manatee County Sheriff's Office indicated that every new position it filled during the last several years had been grant-funded. The Manatee County Sheriff's Office's participation in the Weed and Seed program led to its COPS grant award. In 1996, both counties received a COPS domestic violence grant, and the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program was awarded the NPRL site designation and grant. Other sources of funding related to the Weed and Seed effort included the Byrne Formula Grant Program and the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant Program.

4.0 Program Structure and Chronology

4.1 Formal Organizational Structure

The grantee was Drug Free Communities, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization that predates the Weed and Seed program and serves both counties. The Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program required more extensive organizational structure than many other programs due to its inclusion of six target areas in two counties involving four local law enforcement agencies, as illustrated in exhibit 4.1. The program consisted of: (1) six Neighborhood Action Teams that included target area residents and representatives of organizations, businesses, and law enforcement agencies operating in the target area who were responsible for establishing local goals and action plans, essentially directing nonenforcement initiatives in each of the target areas; (2) one overall steering committee for seeding that included elected representatives from the different neighborhood action teams and one for weeding that included representatives from law enforcement; and (3) Drug Free Communities, the administrative organization for the Weed and Seed program, whose staff oversaw and coordinated the six individual, but connected, Weed and Seed efforts.¹³

Weeding activity in Manatee/Sarasota was directed by the Weed and Seed Violent Crimes Task Force (VCTF), an entity created in conjunction with the Weed and Seed program. This task force included representation from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the U.S. Attorney's Office; the U.S. Marshal's Service; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF); the Florida Division of Law Enforcement (FDLE); the Bradenton Police Department; the Manatee County Sheriff's Office; the Sarasota Police Department; and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office. The jurisdictional characteristics of the six sites are as follows:

Site	County	Police Department
North Manatee	Manatee	Manatee County Sheriff's Office
South Manatee	Manatee	Manatee County Sheriff's Office
Central Bradenton	Manatee	Bradenton Police Department
Greater Downtown Sarasota (a.k.a. Gillespie Park)	Sarasota	Sarasota Police Department
Newtown	Sarasota	Sarasota Police Department and Sarasota County Sheriff's Office
Laurel/Nokomis	Sarasota	Sarasota County Sheriff's Office

The task force was regulated by an official memorandum of understanding and was directed by the FBI—therefore the weeding director was an FBI agent. Weeding activities were overseen by the executive council that governed the entire program for both counties, with some guidance provided by the two county boards and the six target area Neighborhood Action Teams. (Community oriented policing officers attended the monthly Neighborhood Action Team meetings to hear residents' concerns.)

¹³ Initially, there were also two county boards and an executive council, but these extra structures were unnecessary and complicated.

**EXHIBIT 4.1, "WEED AND SEED
PROGRAM ORGANIZATION," IS NOT
AVAILABLE IN THIS FORMAT.**

The executive director of Drug Free Communities served as the seeding director for the program and as the overall Weed and Seed coordinator. Program staffing has been fairly stable except for two changes. First, in February 1996, the executive director of Drug Free Communities was replaced. The replacement director had previously worked for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Tampa and was familiar with Weed and Seed. She was also knowledgeable about other types of federally funded prevention and neighborhood revitalization initiatives. Second, initial program staffing in Manatee/Sarasota included full-time coordinators for each of the six target areas. In 1996, it was decided that these target area coordinator positions were not necessary, so the positions were eliminated and replaced by one safe haven/community outreach coordinator for each of the two counties. (Once the communities had been mobilized, having full-time paid target area coordinators tended to inhibit the development of volunteer grassroots initiative.)

Staff positions varied according to the level of funding available to Drug Free Communities, including the CSAP grant as well as Weed and Seed. For 1996–97, the Weed and Seed application proposed funding 7.82 dedicated full-time equivalent (FTE) positions with primarily seeding-related duties, as follows:

Weed and Seed Coordinator/Seed Coordinator (filled by Executive Director of Drug Free Communities)	.35 FTE
Information Specialist/Operations Manager	.32 FTE
Prevention Manager	.15 FTE
Prevention Specialist	.50 FTE
Communication Coordinator	.50 FTE
Safe Haven/Community Outreach Coordinators	2.0 FTE
Administrative Assistant	1.0 FTE
Research Assistant	1.0 FTE
Safe Haven Coordinator	1.0 FTE
Community Support Specialist	1.0 FTE

These seeding staff reported to the Executive Director of Drug Free Communities.

4.2 Proposed Goals and Strategies

Year One, 1994–95. In the original Weed and Seed application in 1994, North Manatee's mission statement was as follows: "The North County Neighborhood Action Team, being broadly representative of the community, seeks to work for the betterment of the community by facilitating communication with residents, assessing needs, and promoting programs to meet those needs in the areas of neighborhood revitalization, economic development, housing, education, day care, recreation, health, and law enforcement."

The stated law enforcement goals were to reduce street-level drug dealing, reduce the level of violent and property crimes occurring in the neighborhood, and increase residents' feeling of safety. Officers planned to establish the Weed and Seed Violent Crimes Task Force and to redirect the activities of the anticrime unit to reduce the number of property crimes in the North County neighborhood. They also planned to reduce the response time for calls for assistance, establish a community policing unit, and increase citizen participation in neighborhood action teams. Community policing goals included expansion of the community policing concept to include line officers in the target neighborhood and involvement of residents of the target area in police problem-solving activities in the neighborhood.

Prevention, intervention, and treatment goals were to establish a safe haven, hire a part-time community organizer, introduce new services to the community, and increase supervised recreational activities for youths. Neighborhood restoration aims included establishing a staff for economic development in the target area, more community parks, a job training program, a community bulletin board for jobs, and a program to assist individuals in obtaining job training and employment.

In South Manatee, goals were similar for all program components, with additional seeding goals of making Daughtrey Elementary a full-service elementary school and increasing code enforcement for neighborhood restoration.

Year Two, 1995–96. For the second year of Weed and Seed, while most of the goals and objectives remained the same, additional strategies included establishing the capability at the safe haven to respond to residents' requests or complaints, promoting and publicizing available services, and working with local government to increase supervised recreational activities. New neighborhood restoration goals for both neighborhoods focused on increasing the economic vitality of the target area through job training and placement programs, business development programs, increased banking services, and recruiting volunteers and organizing an economic development task force.

Year Three, 1996–97. For the third year, the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program requested and received a funding increase to a total of \$840,000. The original program goals generally remained the same with an additional focus on institutionalization of the Weed and Seed program. New strategies of the Weed and Seed Violent Crimes Task Force included formalizing the working relationships with the community policing officers in the six neighborhoods to enhance intelligence, strengthening the working relationship with the local prosecutor's office, and increasing gang prevention and enforcement efforts. The area safe havens planned to integrate a community-based domestic violence response into their services.

Year Four, 1997–98. The Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program transitioned into a training site in the fourth year, with funding significantly reduced to \$175,000. The funds were used to further institutionalize the program and develop a peer-to-peer training capacity for new and emerging Weed and Seed sites throughout the counties. Drug Free Communities staff and representatives from VCTF had already provided training and technical assistance to a wide range of groups interested in Weed and Seed.

Fourth-year Weed and Seed program goals also included law enforcement plans to develop a comprehensive tracking system for task force operations. Prevention, intervention, and treatment goals included implementation of a comprehensive communitywide volunteer and business partner

program to support Weed and Seed needs and to continue to secure financial support from local groups.

4.3 Budget Information

As illustrated in exhibit 4.2, Manatee/Sarasota was a fully funded Weed and Seed demonstration site, receiving a total of \$750,000 per year for the first 2 years, \$840,000 in the third year, and \$175,000 in the fourth year.

Exhibit 4.2
Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed Budget Allocations

	FY 1994	FY 1995	FY 1996	FY 1997
TOTAL	\$750,000	\$750,000	\$840,000	\$175,000
WEEDING TOTAL	\$374,360	\$352,500	\$180,800	
Enforcement personnel (task force)	\$124,360	\$102,500		
Enforcement (overtime)	\$75,000	\$80,000	\$87,500	
Enforcement equipment, supplies, & services	\$89,700	\$81,000	\$77,800	
Office rent, telephone & supplies	\$65,300	\$79,000		
Training			\$4,500	
Travel	\$20,000	\$10,000	\$11,000	
COMMUNITY POLICING	\$0	\$0	\$103,000	
Community policing salaries	\$0	\$0	\$102,500	
Recognition event			\$500	
SEEDING TOTAL	\$328,907	\$268,307	\$307,440	
Seeding administration/employees	\$182,567	\$151,007	\$150,940	
Prevention programs	\$135,000	\$108,000	\$143,500	
Transportation—safe havens	\$0	\$0	\$7,000	
Seeding equipment/supplies	\$7,740	\$9,300	\$4,500	
Travel expenses	\$3,600	\$3,600	\$1,500	
OTHER TOTAL	\$46,733	\$129,193	\$248,760	
Administrative staff	\$14,083	\$93,308	\$99,543	
Travel/conferences	\$20,000	\$5,640	\$22,650	
Office rent/telephone/supplies/services	\$0	\$12,595	\$111,567	
Miscellaneous	\$7,650	\$9,450	\$5,500	
Training	\$0	\$3,600	\$2,000	
Local evaluation	\$5,000	\$4,600	\$7,500	

Source: Compiled from Weed and Seed grant applications; includes Asset Forfeiture funding.

On the seeding side, the basic approach in Manatee/Sarasota has been to fund Weed and Seed office staff and prevention programs in the six target areas. As noted above, full-time site coordinators were initially funded for each of the six target areas, but this proved to be an excessive level of staffing for most individual sites. Seeding activities were also provided by most of the other Weed and Seed office staff identified earlier. The salary and benefits cost of seeding-oriented staff for Manatee/Sarasota's 1996–97 program, the final year of full grant funding, represented about a quarter of its total grant.

Prevention/safe haven programs in the six target areas were funded by the Weed and Seed office through mini-grants to entities that provide educational, recreational, and vocational services. (See Approach to Seeding, section 5.7, for full descriptions of funded programs.) In addition, in its 1996–97 grant, Drug Free Communities sought funds to enhance safe haven programs at its new offices at the Police Athletic League Academy, run by the Manatee County Sheriff's Office. (This academy is an official charter school housed in a facility that was previously an elementary and middle school.) These prevention programs accounted for about 17 percent of the total Weed and Seed grant budget in 1996–97.

On the weeding side, Manatee/Sarasota's Weed and Seed program funds overtime salaries for local officers working with the Violent Crime Task Force, partial salaries and benefits for local officers engaged in community policing activities in the six target areas, informant money, and miscellaneous equipment and other expenses associated with weeding activities (such as rented vehicles, cellular phone service, and investigative travel). In the 1996–97 grant, overtime enforcement accounted for about 10 percent of the total budget; community policing activities, 12 percent; informant money, 4 percent; and miscellaneous weeding expenses, 6 percent.

4.4 Information Systems

Drug Free Communities maintained a special library collection related to substance abuse, crime and crime prevention, community empowerment, and youth programming. This library was open and available to the communities served. On average, the library received at least 15 requests per month for technical assistance. Drug Free Communities also maintained demographic data on all local target areas. Many agencies and groups accessed this data base to prepare grant applications. The technical assistance and library function proved to be an important component of the services provided through Weed and Seed.

One technique that was used in Manatee/Sarasota to identify neighborhood problems and strategies was the Communities That Care model. Statistical information was gathered on the various risk factors for substance abuse in the two counties, and target area residents were encouraged to use the information along with neighborhood-specific knowledge when choosing Weed and Seed prevention programs for their target areas. This method reportedly yielded mixed results, with some residents feeling the approach was too rigid and academic. Program staff felt the model helped establish coherent criteria on which to select seeding programs, but they also felt the process would have been more effective if it had started earlier and if it were more accessible to community members. Subsequently, some efforts were made to engage in capacity mapping for each target area to identify neighborhood strengths and resources that could be built on to solve chronic problems.

On the law enforcement side, the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program decided it was not necessary to invest in any special information systems, crime analysis, or computer mapping as existing systems were felt to be satisfactory. It should be noted that since this program involved two counties and several local and Federal law enforcement agencies, any allocation of funds for information system enhancement would almost certainly have had to address the capabilities and needs of several different agencies with different forms, systems, hardware, and software—a daunting task. Efforts were under way, however, to develop a tracking system for the Violent Crimes Task Force, including tracking of cases generated by VCTF.

4.5 Site Monitoring, Reporting, and Local Evaluation

The Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program and the grantee, Drug Free Communities, did a commendable job of gathering extensive demographic and other information that was used for internal reports as well as progress reports to the funding agency. An information specialist position partially funded by the grant was devoted largely to the task of gathering project-related data and making it available to other program staff and to community residents. She compiled an extensive database of information and administered community surveys in the six target areas.

Despite the extensive data collection undertaken by the grantee, no local evaluation has yet been conducted. During the first year of funding, the four Middle District Florida Weed and Seed sites pooled resources and agreed to contract for one evaluation to cover all four sites. After a lengthy process, a request for proposals for a combined local evaluation was issued in early 1998.

Drug Free Communities retained the recently retired chief of the Sarasota Police Department to compile a report on VCTF, based on data provided by the grantee and the participating law enforcement agencies.

5.0 Key Implementation Issues and Interpretation

5.1 Role of Grantee Organization

The Weed and Seed recipient agency in Manatee/Sarasota was Drug Free Communities, Inc., a nonprofit organization, created by Bradenton mayor Bill Evers, under a grant from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. The Weed and Seed effort expanded the role of Drug Free Communities to encompass Sarasota County as well as Manatee County.

Although it is unusual for a Weed and Seed grantee to be anything other than a police department, mayor's office, or similar governmental agency, this approach seems to have worked extremely well for Manatee/Sarasota. As a practical matter, of course, the fact this Weed and Seed program stretched over two counties would have made it very difficult for any single government agency to serve

effectively as the grant-receiving entity. For the first few years of the Weed and Seed program, Drug Free Communities leased office space in a small building on the border between the two counties. Symbolically, this seemed to serve both counties better than operating out of any existing government building, especially since the multiagency VCTF also operated out of the building. Having both seeding and weeding activities based in the same office space also helped cement Drug Free Communities' role as the facilitator of the entire project.

Other factors help explain why a nonprofit organization succeeded as the Weed and Seed grantee in this instance. Prior to Weed and Seed, Drug Free Communities already had strong grassroots organizational and political support in Manatee County. These preexisting relationships helped Drug Free Communities to be effective with Weed and Seed. Furthermore, as a community-based nonprofit organization, Drug Free Communities perhaps had more credibility in implementing a community-based program than would the police department, with its law enforcement focus, or the county government, which is more distant from the neighborhood level and potentially more susceptible to political concerns. Since Manatee/Sarasota took a community empowerment approach with its Weed and Seed program, trust was a particularly important issue.

On the weeding side, VCTF was headed by the FBI and composed of representatives from numerous Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies so this task force was probably destined to operate rather independently. That is, even if the Weed and Seed grantee had been a police department, this task force, with its broad representation and Federal leadership, would have tended to operate with a great deal of autonomy.

Two other factors bear mentioning. One is that the current executive director of Drug Free Communities developed very good relationships with weeding officers and law enforcement executives. Her previous position as a law enforcement coordinator with the U.S. Attorney's Office perhaps gave her some additional credibility on the weeding side (though she is not an attorney), but she was also quite careful not to abuse her organization's authority as the official Weed and Seed grantee. In other words, she fulfilled the role of overall program coordinator effectively, but she did not attempt to direct day-to-day weeding activities. Also, her knowledge of Federal grants and connections with funding agencies gained her additional respect from weeding staff. In addition, a community organization dedicated to reducing drug abuse is probably likely to receive more law enforcement support than most other types of nonprofit community-based organizations.

5.2 Management Structure and Control

Decisionmaking authority and accountability

With respect to seeding, decisions in Manatee/Sarasota were clearly made in a collaborative fashion. The individual Neighborhood Action Teams in each target area were given authority to identify the types of prevention programs they needed and to make preliminary program selections. Initially, the two county boards, which met monthly, provided the guidance and oversight on all program issues, with final decisions made by the executive council that oversaw the entire Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program. Eventually, this structure was simplified to replace the county boards and executive council with a weeding steering committee and a seeding steering committee. The Neighborhood Action Teams retained considerable influence, however; for example, the impetus to

eliminate the six neighborhood coordinator positions and to reprogram much of those funds for direct services came largely from the Neighborhood Action Teams.

The U.S. Attorney and U.S. Attorney's staff played a strong supporting role in the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program; though they were not as active in management and organization as at some other sites, where, for instance, the U.S. Attorney chaired the Weed and Seed steering committee, convened meetings, and participated in policy decisionmaking. A contributing factor to this was undoubtedly the multiplicity of Weed and Seed sites in this U.S. Attorney's jurisdiction. When the evaluation began, there were six separate Weed and Seed grant recipients; another six were added later. Day-to-day participation by the U.S. Attorney's Office in management and organization was more limited under these circumstances than in locations where the U.S. Attorney dealt with only one site.

However, the U.S. Attorney's Office law enforcement coordinating committee (LECC) coordinator or an Assistant U.S. Attorney generally attended Weed and Seed meetings when notified of them, and an Assistant U.S. Attorney also participated in most task force meetings. Also, the U.S. Attorney helped sponsor a variety of training and technical assistance programs for Weed and Seed sites, including 40 hours of community policing training in both 1996 and 1998, and a school safety seminar. The U.S. Attorney also established and maintained a Web site that helped coordinate activities and disseminate information among several Weed and Seed sites (of which Manatee/Sarasota was only one).

Of particular note is the approach the U.S. Attorney has taken toward asset forfeitures. When real property was seized, the U.S. Attorney deeded it back to communities if the Weed and Seed steering committee had a plan for using it (rather than having it go to Federal agencies). This strategy was used for two properties in the North Manatee site, one of which became the community center where a variety of seeding programs were based.

Although a "bottom-up" process seems to have been generally followed with respect to seeding initiatives in Manatee/Sarasota, this has been less true for enforcement-related initiatives. Weeding activity by VCTF has been guided more by police information—serious crimes that have recently occurred in target areas, information from informants, and crime analysis information. Decisions were made collaboratively among the members of VCTF. Two members of the task force, the FBI agent in charge and a lieutenant from the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, seemed to provide most of the day-to-day direction for the unit. The sheriff's office lieutenant worked with the task force since its inception and was responsible for targeted enforcement in the North Manatee target area even before the task force was created. These factors, as well as his general expertise, reputation, and good working relationships with other task force members help account for his considerable influence.

Community policing initiatives seemed to respond both to community requests and to overall strategies for the implementation of community policing developed by each individual law enforcement agency. Decisions were made in a more decentralized and agency-by-agency manner. Each of the four participating local law enforcement agencies received some funding from the Weed and Seed program for community policing activities, with decisions about the nature of those activities generally left to each agency.

5.3 Local Politics

The Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program seems to have been remarkably free of local political interference. The elected sheriffs of the two counties directed their agencies to participate fully in the program and provided their full support. The two municipal police agencies involved (Sarasota and Bradenton) have not seen their participation affected by local politics. The local prosecutor serves a multicounty area and has not seen any political ramifications to Weed and Seed. Grassroots support for the program, particularly in the six target areas, has been positive, making it unlikely that elected officials would oppose any of its initiatives.

The current sheriff of Manatee County has been innovative, involving his office in some rather nontraditional activities, such as running the charter school. If a new sheriff is elected, the continuation of such activities might be imperiled, given the county's financial constraints.

5.4 Approach to Weeding

The cornerstone of the weeding strategy has been the multijurisdictional, interagency Violent Crimes Task Force. Created in August 1994, the purpose of VCTF has been to “reduce the number of violent crimes, murders, robberies, rapes, and aggravated assaults occurring in Manatee and Sarasota Counties.”¹⁴ Coordinated by the FBI, the VCTF includes the four local law enforcement agencies (Sarasota Police Department, Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, Bradenton Police Department, and Manatee County Sheriff's Office), the ATF, the U.S. Marshal's Service, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The task force involves the full-time commitment of personnel by all the participating agencies—Federal, State, and local—and the officers all work from a central location. While the agencies funded the core positions, a second law enforcement position and enforcement overtime were funded by Weed and Seed. The program also paid for VCTF overhead, including rent, equipment, and training.

Prior to Weed and Seed, the four local agencies had never engaged in any significant and ongoing collaborative efforts. Participating local agencies signed a memorandum of understanding allowing the task force to operate unfettered throughout the two counties. Before, when criminals crossed jurisdictional lines, their trail was difficult to follow. With the joint task force in place, criminals can be readily tracked and law enforcement strategies can change immediately to adapt to crime trends.

The VCTF strategy focused on street-level drug dealing and violent crimes (mostly related to drug sales) in the six target areas and on crimes affecting the quality of life there. Tactics included buy-bust operations and reverses, where undercover agents pose as street dealers. Task force members cited their focus on street-level dealing within neighborhoods as an important supplement to other enforcement activity in the two counties. Existing narcotics units focused on higher level drug cases and lacked the opportunity to concentrate on the street-level dealers who caused the most disruption in the target neighborhoods. The task force also had the advantage of better equipment and more resources, through both Weed and Seed funds and the Federal agencies, than are probably available to the typical street drug unit. While the task force has specifically focused on the target areas, crime-

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and drug-related investigations often lead task force members to other parts of the two counties, as well as to neighboring jurisdictions.

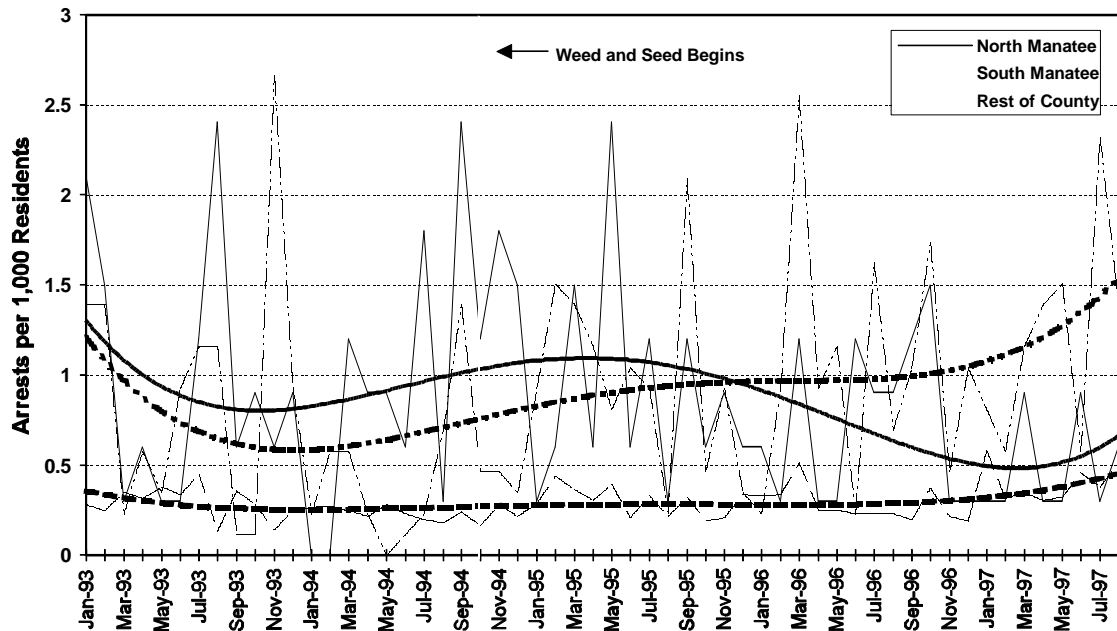
The Weed and Seed Violent Crimes Task Force in Manatee/Sarasota has been very productive, with more than 1,500 arrests and at least 10 Federal indictments within its first year-and-a-half of operation. Eighty-six percent of those arrests were for drug crimes and crimes of violence.¹⁵ Between October 1994 and March 1997—the first 2½ years of the task force—the task force was responsible for 2,766 arrests in both counties, with a total of 54 Federal cases. In the North and South Manatee target areas, VCTF produced 231 cases during this period. The Manatee County Sheriff's Office estimated the 15-person task force and community police team were responsible for 30 percent of arrests in Manatee County, which in 1997 had a police force of approximately 340 officers. It was estimated that on a productive evening, a VCTF reverse sting operation typically led to 20–30 arrests. The task force works closely with the community police officers, who have gotten to know the target neighborhoods and have become key informants.

Incident-level arrest data provided by the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, which has jurisdiction over the North and South Manatee target areas, were used to analyze arrest trends following the implementation of Weed and Seed. Exhibit 5.1 shows the trend in drug arrests per 1,000 residents for January 1993 through August 1997, comparing the North and South Manatee target areas with the rest of Manatee County.¹⁶ The monthly fluctuations have been smoothed, using a statistically fitted curve to summarize the time trend for each geographic area. Exhibit 5.2 provides a similar display for monthly arrests (per 1,000) for Part 1 crimes.

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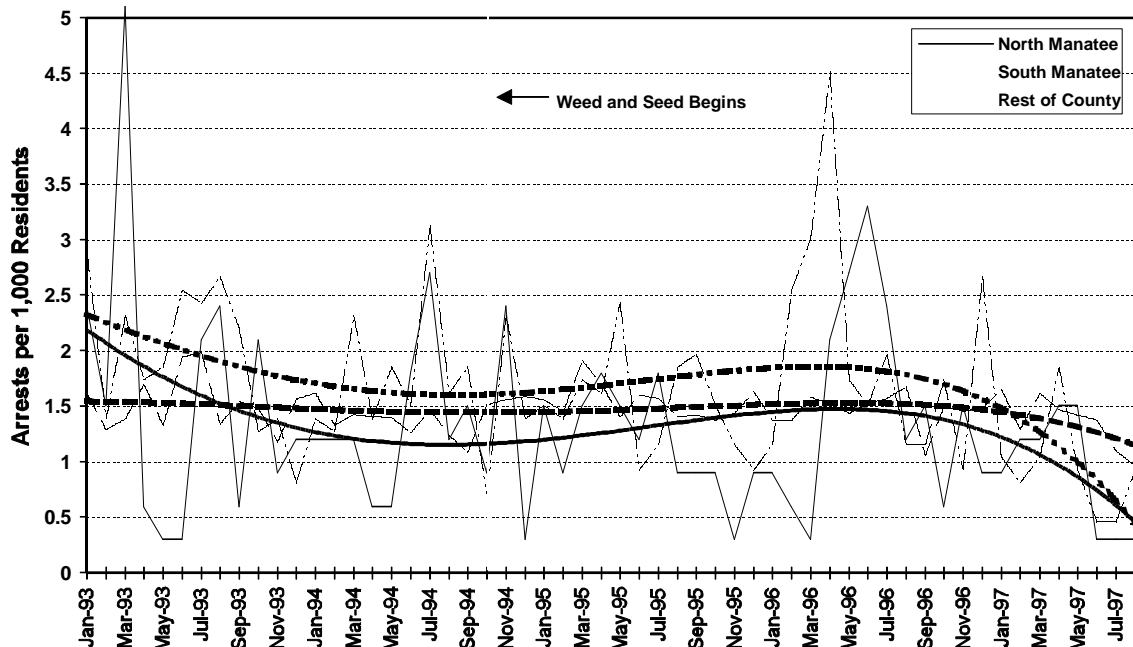
16 Manatee County data includes all areas under the jurisdiction of the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, which includes an area with an estimated population of 154,000. Other law enforcement agencies (whose jurisdictions are not included in these data) in Manatee County include the Bradenton City Police Department, Palmetto City Police Department, Holmes Beach Police Department, and Bradenton Beach Police Department.

Exhibit 5.1
Drug Arrests per Capita by Month



Source: Incident-level police data provided by the Manatee County Sheriff's Office. Rest of county includes all areas under the jurisdiction of the Manatee County Sheriff's Office.

Exhibit 5.2
Part 1 Arrests per Capita by Month



Source: Incident-level police data provided by the Manatee County Sheriff's Office. Rest of county includes all areas under the jurisdiction of the Manatee County Sheriff's Office.

Officially, the Weed and Seed program began with the grant award in October 1994. There was an intensive pre-Weed and Seed crackdown in the target areas, however, beginning in October 1992 and continuing into January 1993; this enforcement activity was concentrated mostly in North Manatee. Both exhibits reflect the high arrest levels in January 1993, which declined for a period thereafter.

During the first year of Weed and Seed—October 1994 through September 1995—drug arrests in North Manatee increased 26 percent compared with the prior year (from 35 to 44 arrests); in South Manatee drug arrests increased by 46 percent (from 67 to 98). Drug arrests were consistently higher in the target areas than in the rest of the county, except that by 1996, drug arrests in North Manatee began to converge with the rest of the county, reaching almost the same levels in 1997. (This corresponded with a dramatic decrease in crime in North Manatee, which is discussed in section 6.1, Analysis of Crime Data.) In South Manatee, drug arrests continued climbing into 1997 because that area continued to have relatively more drug crime than North Manatee, which initially received greater weeding focus. There was also some displacement of crime from North to South Manatee.

Total arrests for Part 1 crimes decreased slightly in both target areas in the first year of Weed and Seed compared to the prior year, but then increased 10 percent in North Manatee and 18 percent in South Manatee. The relatively lower levels of arrests in the first year reflect the results of the preweeding efforts—focused on property crimes and burglaries—that helped stabilize Part 1 crime in both target areas prior to Weed and Seed. This also reflects the Weed and Seed Violent Crimes Task Force’s focus on drug-related crime.

According to local law enforcement officials, the biggest Weed and Seed development has been the level of cooperation across the four local agencies through the Violent Crimes Task Force. It is expected the Weed and Seed experience will lead to other forms of collaboration among these agencies in the future. The Federal-local law enforcement cooperation, while satisfactory before in individual jurisdictions, has become much more complete and effective with the task force and under FBI leadership.

Besides the multiagency nature of the weeding approach in Manatee/Sarasota, police officials cited the focus on the six target areas as a key factor in their success (in both arrests and crime reduction). They indicated these six areas were really the only hospitable neighborhoods for significant street crime and street-level drug dealing in the two counties so, by targeting all six, offenders had no easy or obvious alternatives for relocation. Police officials indicated that some displacement had created a few other minor hot spots during the Weed and Seed program (two of the target areas were expanded slightly to account for such displacement), but it was a manageable situation for them. Basically, they felt a substantial amount of crime and drug dealing had been incapacitated, deterred, and displaced to other jurisdictions, or at least so widely dispersed that no other neighborhoods in the two counties had been seriously affected.

Prosecution

A key relationship for any Weed and Seed program is the police-prosecution linkage. Cooperation with the U.S. Attorney in seeking Federal prosecutions has been satisfactory, and local prosecution has been vigorous for cases not meeting Federal criteria. While local prosecutors have not made any

special staff assignments or redeployments in conjunction with Weed and Seed, communication and cooperation between the district attorney's office and Weed and Seed staff has been strong; task force cases were stamped and given some extra attention as resources permitted. Police officials reported satisfaction with local prosecutors' handling of Weed and Seed cases, and prosecutors indicated the task force had good personnel and produced good cases. The head local prosecutor attends the quarterly Weed and Seed executive council meetings and expressed support for the program's focus on the counties' worst neighborhoods and on quality-of-life issues.

Although the U.S. Attorney's general level of participation in management and operations was limited to support functions, U.S. Attorney involvement in the task force was more prominent. An Assistant U.S. Attorney was assigned to participate in task force activities by attending meetings, reviewing potential Federal prosecutions, assisting in obtaining Federal wiretaps, and so forth. As noted, the primary emphasis of the task force was on street-level crime. This had very positive results in terms of arrests, but it diminished the potential for Federal involvement in enforcement and prosecution, both on jurisdictional and "threshold" grounds. The U.S. Attorney and the FBI have argued for an enhanced strategic approach, wherein more serious offenses and offenders would be targeted. This seems to have had limited consequences.

Nevertheless, more than 50 task force cases have been prosecuted federally, and police officials did not express any particular concern about excessively strict criteria for Federal prosecution. Three factors seem to apply in this situation. In South Florida, the Federal criteria for drug cases, although strict, can often be met because of the level of drug dealing that takes place. Related to that issue, police in South Florida may have a somewhat higher threshold than their colleagues in many other States for what constitutes a major drug case and thus are not as likely to be frustrated when Federal prosecutors decline a drug case for insufficient quantity. Finally, because local prosecution has been vigorous and State-level penalties in Florida are reasonably severe, police officials are often just as satisfied with local prosecution of their cases as with Federal prosecution.

5.5 Approach to Community Policing

As a general rule, community policing efforts early in the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program were seen as a supplement to weeding efforts and sometimes were nearly indistinguishable from weeding activity. As the program developed, however, community policing activity seemed to mature and attain more stature within the Weed and Seed strategy. It must also be recognized, however, that community policing initiatives within the four participating local law enforcement agencies proceeded independently and somewhat differently.

Prior to Weed and Seed, the Manatee County Sheriff's Office did not have a community oriented policing program. Weed and Seed provided the impetus to launch the program (since having one was a requirement of participation in Weed and Seed) and also led to the COPS grant award, which paid for all the Manatee County community oriented policing officers. Since the program was new in Manatee County, the biggest challenge was to convert a very traditional police agency into a community oriented policing one, with slower acceptance at the middle-management levels.

Each of the four local law enforcement agencies initially assigned a number of officers (3–6 per target area) to provide community policing services within the Weed and Seed sites in their jurisdictions. In many cases, at the outset, they essentially served as the uniformed patrol arm of the Violent Crimes Task Force, targeting street crime and disorder and supporting the task force on raids, warrants, and investigations. Due to their continued presence in the target areas, however, many of these officers developed informants and substantial local knowledge. Weed and Seed staff felt the improved police-citizen relations and trust also increased reporting of crime. Some of the officers used bicycle patrols, which led to increased citizen contact. Additionally, the safe havens in several target areas became either official or unofficial police ministations, further increasing contact between the officers and community residents and, in some cases, integrating the officers with seeding activities in the neighborhoods.

By late 1997, community policing had developed fairly significantly in all four local law enforcement agencies. The Manatee and Sarasota County Sheriffs' Offices both assigned officers specifically to community policing duties but tried to integrate these officers more fully with regular patrol to reduce problems associated with a special unit. The Sarasota Police Department, which already had a community policing program established before Weed and Seed, adopted the generalist approach, where officers integrated community oriented policing with enforcement; they also adopted permanent geographic assignment for patrol officers, with lieutenants commanding each of three districts. The Bradenton Police Department still had a special unit, the Crime Response Team, that operated on bicycles in target areas, including the Weed and Seed site in the city, but was in the process of opening several substations to enhance its implementation of community policing. It is probably true that for both the two sheriffs' offices and the Bradenton department, the Weed and Seed experience propelled them further along the line toward community policing. The Sarasota Police Department, on the other hand, seems to have gotten an earlier start at community policing and probably did not need the impetus provided by the Weed and Seed program quite as much.

Several specific community policing programs and techniques were used by the local law enforcement agencies as part of, or in conjunction with, the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program. Besides bicycle patrols and ministations, these included nuisance abatement, graffiti eradication, neighborhood cleanups, youth recreational programs, and holiday gift drives.¹⁷ Community police officers worked closely with the landlord association in South Manatee to decrease property vandalism, which decreased property losses for landlords. Previously, the landlords had difficulty attracting new tenants and lost money on existing properties. (The landlords' biggest complaint was paying \$1,000–\$2,000 per month in broken windows; the community police officers talked with the youths involved, and such damages have decreased by 50 percent to 75 percent, according to the Manatee County Sheriff's Office.) In perhaps the boldest of all community policing initiatives, the sheriff of Manatee County opened a charter school at his Police Athletic League Academy, which is based in a former elementary/middle school facility. Going beyond the usual community policing maxim to work closely with schools, his agency actually runs the school.

17 The community police officers wrote the nuisance abatement law and sat with the county commissioners to see it through.

5.6 Approach to Seeding

The Manatee/Sarasota seeding strategy relied on community mobilization, direct service delivery, and staff assistance from the Weed and Seed office. Program staff seemed very conscious of the need to create initiatives, programs, and capacities that could be sustained beyond the life of Weed and Seed. While the overall experience varied widely among the six target areas, a central seeding strategy was community empowerment. Much of the program's efforts have been devoted toward identifying community leaders and building community organizations. Most areas now have active Neighborhood Action Teams of residents who direct seeding efforts in their neighborhoods and make program selections; Weed and Seed staff provided guidance on feasibility and implementation issues to each target area. In each target area safe havens have been established as planned, along with a variety of recreational and educational activities for youths.

In the North Manatee target area, seeding efforts centered around the safe haven facility known as the "Anna Gayle Center." Once a drug house, this facility was deeded by the courts to the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, which in turn deeded it to Drug Free Communities in 1992. Several programs for children and parents were offered at the facility, including tutoring and educational consulting, drug abuse prevention, and summer employment for youths. (See detailed description of seeding programs, with provider interviews, at the end of this section.) A variety of other community meetings, senior citizen activities, and special interest classes were also held at the house. A group of retired school teachers (Educational Consultants Consortium) provided many of the services at the Anna Gayle Center, and they frequently helped area parents negotiate with school system officials. In addition, a domestic violence counselor had an office in the facility, as did the sheriff's department.

In South Manatee, seeding activities were based at the Community Pride Center safe haven, a house obtained from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for \$1 per year. The principal Weed and Seed-funded service provided at the center was afterschool tutoring (4 days per week). Other types of activities based at the house included Bible study, programs for grandparents, crime watch meetings, resident association meetings, and adult literacy classes. Also through the Community Pride Center area youths were referred to various educational and recreational programs, such as Police Athletic League summer camp scholarships and the Daughtrey School Pride Dance Team. This facility also housed an office for the sheriff's department and one for a domestic violence coordinator.

Code enforcement was a particular problem in South Manatee due to the high proportion of duplex rental properties. The South Manatee target area had an active citizen patrol, which had been vigilant about code enforcement. For example, the group's leader routinely sent faxes from the safe haven to the city to request prompt attention to code violations. As a result of such efforts, the appearance of the neighborhood has improved considerably.

The success of the North and South Manatee safe haven facilities seems to have depended, at least in part, on two dedicated and charismatic community leaders. Both Weed and Seed officials and community residents cited these two women as responsible for increasing resident participation in their respective safe haven programs. Designated residents, including these leaders, oversaw use of the safe havens and retained the keys for the neighborhoods.

A variety of other seeding activities served these two target areas, including the Boys and Girls Club gang prevention program, the People of Color AIDS Coalition, and Volunteer Services of Manatee County, which engaged youths ages 8–18 to paint the homes of senior citizens in the South Manatee target area.¹⁸ These activities are described below, incorporating comments from providers who were interviewed about their programs and their experience with Weed and Seed. (General comments about Weed and Seed are at the end of this section.)

Seeding program descriptions and provider interviews

1996–97 Programs

Educational Consultants Consortium (ECC)

Youth Crime Stoppers 4H

Tutoring services

Summer work program

Iron Sharpening Iron, educational consulting services

1996–97 funding: \$21,105

Educational Consultants Consortium (ECC) consists of a group of retired educators who help at-risk families address concerns related to educational and/or community agency services. Conceived and directed by a former director of elementary schools, ECC served more than 137 people. Programs included: Iron Sharpening Iron, which provides mediation and consulting services to parents who want help resolving school problems; a youth summer work and training program; Youth Crime Stoppers 4H, a community service organization for middle school-age youths, with 43 participants in North Manatee; and tutoring programs. This innovative collection of programs took a comprehensive and intensive approach in keeping at-risk youths and families engaged in ongoing educational programs. The effort operated out of the Anna Gayle Center safe haven, which the ECC director volunteered to help run.

18 Seeding efforts in the three Sarasota County target areas were generally less established than in Manatee, perhaps because Drug Free Communities was initially formed in Manatee County and thus did not have the same grassroots infrastructure in Sarasota. The most successful effort has been in the Gillespie Park/Downtown Sarasota target area, where an active neighborhood association preceded Weed and Seed and the safe haven is located in a new police substation. The Neighborhood Action Team (NAT) in this area has partnered with several other community groups and taken the initiative in developing needed services. This target area has the largest Hispanic population of the six Weed and Seed sites (including illegals), and NAT has participated in efforts to reach out to this part of the community.

In the Newtown target area, which includes both city and county jurisdictions, NAT withered after the police established a separate group to tackle neighborhood problems (which came to be dominated by one particular resident), but NAT is now being reestablished. The principal service program in Newtown has been Project Challenge, which helps residents develop better employment skills. A major focus in Newtown has also been on neighborhood revitalization through cleanups. Newtown has the largest population of the six target areas, which may have added to the challenges in that site.

The Laurel/Nokomis target area has also had its difficulties. It probably had the least serious crime and drug problems of the six target areas, which may have contributed to a lack of focus and consensus among program participants. Most of the seeding services in the area, such as the Police Athletic League (PAL), a bike rodeo, a summer camp, and a Christmas “Adopt a Family” drive, have been provided by the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office. This target area has not been very successful in developing its own leadership or grassroots activities.

Weed and Seed, initially the sole funder of ECC, enabled the startup effort. Even when there were lapses in funding, the programs never stopped because the staff were committed to providing these services. The ECC director said that without Weed and Seed, however, they could not have offered the youth summer work and training program. In this program, more than 100 middle school-age children received employment training and were placed in community jobs during the summer months, for which they received a stipend. They also participated in daily courses, such as math, teen pregnancy education, and attitude adjustment courses taught by ministers who emphasized communication and manners.

Many of these same youths then joined the Youth Crime Stoppers program, which involved them in community service, cultural activities, and in tutoring elementary school children in reading. Weed and Seed funded these program activities and outreach. According to ECC's director (and parents and participants who were interviewed), participants improved academic performance, made new friends, and enjoyed special activities, such as concerts and recreational field trips. She said these children provided examples to other children in their schools and showed their friends the rewards of participation. On "Red Ribbon Day," a day celebrating being drug-free, the children gave out red ribbons at school and talked about staying away from drugs. The director said she lost a few children to selling drugs, but not many. The youths have a direct line with the police, and a police officer is stationed at the Anna Gayle Center. Last year, the Youth Crime Stoppers won a national award for their service project to beautify the Anna Gayle Center, a former drug house, acquired through Asset Forfeiture funds. According to ECC's director, these children provide a different resource for the community than if they had not been in the program.

The ECC program has sparked wide interest, with other counties and retired educators requesting information to replicate the program elsewhere.

Drug Free Communities and the Police Athletic League Summer Program

1997 funding: \$25,000

Weed and Seed provided scholarships to approximately 90 youths from the Manatee County target neighborhoods to attend the Police Athletic League (PAL) Summer Program.¹⁹ This covered the cost of PAL membership, transportation, and field trips. This 9-week program focused on recreation, sports, and classes, including tennis, dancing, acting, creative writing, video production, and a variety of art classes. In addition, there were entrepreneurial projects in which the youths produced and sold their crafts. In total, 200 young people participated in the program. Program staff said there was a 40 percent reduction in daytime burglaries in the target neighborhood while the summer program operated.

19 The \$25,000 in funding came from Asset Forfeiture funds the sheriff's office gave to Drug Free Communities to expand the capacity of the Police Athletic League to serve target area youths.

Boys and Girls Club of Manatee County, Inc.

1996–97 funding: \$14,490

Weed and Seed funded the gang prevention program, a new targeted outreach effort of the Boys and Girls Club in North Manatee and Bradenton. Weed and Seed paid the costs for 1 year of case management for 100 children, beginning in December 1996.

The program took a case management approach for youths in grades 3–8 at risk of gang involvement. The gang prevention targeting and case management was “transparent” in that participating youths did not know they were specially targeted or case managed. Program participants were referred by law enforcement personnel, including school resources officers (deputies assigned to schools), the sheriff’s gang task force, guidance counselors, and parents. Once in the Boys and Girls Club, the youths received extra staff attention and had case managers assigned to watch over their school performance, behavior, and law enforcement involvement. The schools and their principals were actively involved.

The Boys and Girls Club has been active in the target area for decades, but had never had the gang prevention targeting, which involved more outreach to children, schools, and the community.

The executive director of the Manatee County Boys and Girls Club said that without Weed and Seed involvement, the Boys and Girls Club could not have reached those 100 youths, and would not have had the law enforcement component either. In addition, Drug Free Communities already had relations with the schools, making this a stronger partnership and adding vitality to the gang prevention program, according to the Boys and Girls Club director. Now she believes her organization will continue to partner with Drug Free Communities in new collaborations outside of Weed and Seed.

People of Color AIDS Coalition

1996–97 funding: \$3,900

The People of Color AIDS Coalition has been together since July 1995, but they had no funding before Weed and Seed. Representatives went to the Weed and Seed Neighborhood Action Team to request funding to provide AIDS education and prevention information to the community. The coalition’s director said the incidence of HIV in the target area was extremely high, and he saw a need that was not being met. The Weed and Seed funding enabled the coalition to give stipends to four local HIV street outreach workers in high-risk areas. Workers provided prevention information, condoms, referrals, and encouraged testing. They also provided monthly dinners for people living with AIDS, with 50 people in attendance at a recent event. The director said the response from the community has been overwhelming. The organization plans to open a testing site in the target area soon. Now that Weed and Seed has given them the startup money, they are applying for other grants.

Volunteer Services of Manatee County

1996–97 funding: \$3,000

The Volunteer Services of Manatee County received \$3,000 from Weed and Seed to enable their youth volunteers to paint the houses of 10 eligible senior citizens in the target area starting in June 1997. The younger children had the idea for the house-painting service project, and older children helped write the grant, which was submitted to Weed and Seed through the Community Pride Center safe haven. Painters were 8–18 years old; 113 children in this project provided 640 service hours.

On an ongoing basis, Volunteer Services of Manatee has 187 children participating who meet 3 days a week to volunteer. The “Manateen Club” has 7,500 members from every area middle and high school and is the largest program of its kind in the United States, according to the program director. Another Weed and Seed-funded program, the ECC’s Youth Crime Stoppers, plans to partner with the Manateens.

1995–96 Programs

Manatee County Chapter of the NAACP

1995–96 funding: \$6,000

The NAACP of Manatee County used Weed and Seed funding to provide afterschool educational programs for children and families, including tutoring, computer training, and family communication skills training. The Weed and Seed funding paid for the part-time staff who ran the program during the day when volunteers were not as available. The program served approximately 16 people.

Project Heart

1995–96 funding: \$12,000

Project Heart used Weed and Seed funding to provide afterschool tutoring and a social worker for homeless families. The program served approximately 40 students. Many of the children made advances in grade reading level. The program did not receive Weed and Seed funding in the second year due to changing Weed and Seed priorities; consequently, Project Heart reduced its services.

In spite of the discontinuation of funding, the Project Heart director believes that participation in the Weed and Seed program has had lasting effects on his program. The project continued to participate in Weed and Seed activities even when they were not funded because of the advantages of collaboration with other organizations.

Provider comments related to Weed and Seed

The Boys and Girls Club executive director said she is familiar with other Weed and Seed sites that are not as community-based as the Manatee County program. She said this program tries to involve communities to accomplish community-determined needs. She described this as a grassroots program, where Manatee Weed and Seed staff listen to what the community says and try to figure out how to make it happen. Weed and Seed makes it clear to providers that the neighborhood makes the decisions and that providers must justify their programs to the neighborhood. The director also commented that the safe havens have a real community spirit.

The director of the People of Color AIDS Coalition, a neighborhood resident, emphasized the importance of working with the Neighborhood Action Teams to “put programs into action” that meet community needs. He said, “I feel good about what I’m doing because we [the community] are able to do this for ourselves.” The coalition’s director feels the local Weed and Seed program is more effective as a result of being community-based. He said that for too long, the approach was to go after a “quick fix” and do what benefited the provider more than the community. Before, he said, outsiders would be brought in to “fix them up,” only to take their funds and leave the community worse off.

A former provider, the director of Project Heart, thought Weed and Seed was the most effective Federal effort he has seen in his experience. The director felt that the most valuable part of the experience was the collaborative efforts between the programs. Another provider commented, “We didn’t bring anyone into the community. We did it ourselves in the community ... not outside services. This gives empowerment to the community; it shows our youths the good example of seeing leaders active in their own community.”

ECC’s director, a community member of 34 years, added: “There’s a trust level that has already been developed with local people This gives [the program] a chance to mushroom.”

5.7 Concluding Observations

Stakeholder response to Weed and Seed

The perception of police and prosecution officials was that the Weed and Seed program in Manatee/Sarasota has had a dramatic impact on crime, disorder, and street-level drug offenses. Conditions in North Manatee have reportedly improved tremendously since targeted enforcement began in 1992 and also since Weed and Seed began in 1994, although they may have deteriorated slightly in the past year, as attention has been focused elsewhere. Since 1992, a substantial number of new houses have been built in the area and existing homes have been upgraded.²⁰ The unruly crowds that once blocked the streets are no longer seen, and open drug dealing has been severely curtailed. A similar rendition has been provided for South Manatee, where rents are now higher, and the area is perceived as a much more desirable place to live than in 1994. Police officials believed similar, though less dramatic, improvements have been achieved in the other four target areas.

Community leaders and program participants who were interviewed also perceived a decrease in crime in North Manatee. Other observations about this target area included reduced drug traffic, more responsive police, and better interactions between police and youths. One stakeholder even noted that area children were doing better academically and that there had only been one teen pregnancy in the past 2 years. Perceptions were similar among community stakeholders in South Manatee regarding reduced crime and drug dealing, but there seemed to be a stronger sense that the improvements are tenuous and dependent on continued extra police presence. Since South Manatee is more dominated by rental properties, it has a more transient population with less long-term commitment to the neighborhood.

²⁰ In 1997, program staff surveyed the target neighborhood and counted more than 200 new homes.

Organizational effects

The Weed and Seed program in Manatee/Sarasota seems to have had some significant organizational effects. As described above, the Weed and Seed Violent Crimes Task Force was directly responsible for greatly increased collaboration among the four major local law enforcement agencies in the two counties, as well as for increased Federal-local law enforcement collaboration. The Weed and Seed program also brought these four local law enforcement agencies into contact with the nonprofit organization Drug Free Communities, other seeding providers, community leaders, and other stakeholders (such as landlords and property managers) in the six target areas.

The Weed and Seed program in Manatee/Sarasota seems to have helped build community and organizational capacity in at least two target areas. In both North and South Manatee, neighborhood associations were strengthened, community leaders were supported, and new safe haven facilities were provided. These two neighborhoods seem to be substantially safer and healthier than they were before Weed and Seed, and they also seem to have better chances of maintaining their gains.

Lessons

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program has been its comprehensive nature. Not only did the program incorporate the standard comprehensive Weed and Seed model (weeding and seeding activities with the community policing bridge), it also employed a multiagency task force as its principal weeding strategy, and it targeted six separate sites across two counties. Although Weed and Seed funding had to be spread over more areas, this systematic approach to the weeding function greatly increased collaboration among local law enforcement agencies and enhanced Federal-local collaboration. It made simple displacement of crime and drug offenses to other troubled neighborhoods less likely.

Another unusual feature of the Manatee/Sarasota Weed and Seed program was the role played by Drug Free Communities, Inc., a nonprofit organization, as the official grantee. Such an arrangement might seem problematic, especially in terms of securing the full participation and cooperation of Federal and local law enforcement agencies, but in this instance it worked very effectively. Since the grantee lacked the formal authority to command participation from anyone (as would be enjoyed by a police department or mayor's office grantee, for example), a collaborative decisionmaking style was required, and this may have benefited the program in the long run. The six Neighborhood Action Teams and Weed and Seed steering committees all had real roles to play in the program, rather than serving only as window dressing.